

Around Washington -

Indian News Notes

By VINCE LOVETT

BIA MISSION ACCORDING TO ASSISTANT SECRETARY GERARD: Persons who may have wondered why there was a Bureau of Indian Affairs and what its purpose was need wonder no longer. At a December 21 meeting of the BIA Reorganization Task Force, Interior Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Forrest Gerard set forth a three-fold BIA mission: 1) to recognize and preserve the inherent rights of Tribal self-government and to strengthen Tribal capacity to govern, and to provide resources for Tribal Government programs; 2) to serve as an advocate for the sovereignty and rights of American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native groups in dealing with other governmental entities and the private sector; and 3) to fulfill and execute the Federal Government's trust obligation to American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native groups.

GERARD IDENTIFIES KEY BIA RESPONSIBILITIES: At the December 21 BIA Reorganization Task force meeting (see above), Gerard also talked about nine key areas of responsibility for the BIA. No priority indications were given, but they clearly were not listed in alphabetical order. Tribal leaders could use the list for an end of the year evaluation of the BIA services provided them. Gerard's listing is as follows:

Tribal Government: To recognize and preserve the inherent rights of Tribal governments to strengthen their capacity to govern, and to provide resources for Tribal government programs.

Trust responsibilities: To protect, conserve, manage and recover trust assets in accordance with law and with consideration of Tribal desires.

Technical Assistance and Training: To provide staff support and training as requested by Tribal governments to assist them in their self determination efforts.

Administrative/Management Services: To develop and implement those policies and guidelines that support the initiatives mandated by American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native groups. To provide support services that facilitate self-determination efforts within

statutory and regulatory requirements.

People Development and Services: To provide programs and processes designed to improve skills of individuals and provide for a quality of life considering Tribal values and systems.

Resource Development: To generate economic development (income) and employment for Tribal members consistent with Tribal government initiatives.

Communication Services: To provide communication systems to disseminate Bureau and Tribal views on issues to the media, community leaders, Federal state and local programs.

National and State Legislation: To initiate, monitor, and report on national and state legislation affecting Indian Tribes and the Bureau's ability to deliver services. To provide support to Tribal governments in legislative matters.

Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation: To provide the staff research for administrative and program policy formulation and modification. To monitor and evaluate programs and operational processes to meet present and future Bureau needs.

MONDALE SAYS ADMINISTRATION WILL BACK INDIAN TREATY CLAIMS: It wasn't the political, fence-mending thing to say—but Vice President Walter Mondale said to Indian tribal leaders at a January 10 meeting in Albuquerque that the Administration would back Indian treaty claims to scarce resources. Mondale said, that a proposed national Indian policy being prepared by Interior officials, with his assistance, would support negotiated settlement of Indian claims as opposed to a legislative abrogation of treaty rights as proposed in some pending legislation in Congress.

WHAT IMPORT WILL MASHPEE DECISION HAVE? The jury decided that the Wampanoag Indians of Mashpee, Mass., were not legally an Indian tribe in 1976 when they filed their claim to some 16,000 acres of Cape Cod land or in 1790 when the Indian Non-Intercourse Act was first passed. The verdict means that the Indians' claim almost certainly will be dismissed and the residents of Mashpee will resume house-building, mortgaging and other normal property development activities. Attorneys on both sides agree that the decision will have a major psychological impact on other land claims in the east—even though the decision pertained only to tribal status which is not a factor in most of the other claims.